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ABSTRACT

This study describes the function of illustration in the books written by Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. Fifty children between the ages of four and six years old, together with a parent, listened to two books by each author, during three storytime sessions. Children's spontaneous responses to the readings were recorded on videotape. Response was defined as the comments and gestures children made in regard to the readings. Two identical 10-question surveys, one for the books by Sendak and one for the books by Mayer, were administered to parents and children after the storytime session. Responses collected from the data included: likes/dislikes of stories and pictures, scariness of stories and pictures, mood, content of favorite story, and importance of illustrations in understanding the stories better. Results indicated that 98% of the 50 participants liked the stories by Mayer and 86% liked those of Sendak. Participants also liked the pictures, and the stories and the pictures did not scare them. "Happy" and "good" were the predominant feelings generated by the pictures in all four stories. Overall, children liked best Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are" (78%). Responses tabulated from parents suggested that illustration is necessary and helpful to better understand a story. (Contains 28 references and 6 tables of data. Two survey instruments are attached.) (Author/RS)

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THE FUNCTION OF ILLUSTRATION IN THE BOOKS WRITTEN BY MAURICE SENDAK AND MERCER MAYER

by
Christy L. Kaciuba

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan University

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ABSTRACT

Christy L. Kaciuba. The Function of Illustration in the Books Written By Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. 1998. (Under the direction of Dr. Holly G. Willett, Program in School and Public Librarianship).

This study describes the function of illustration in the books written by Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. Fifty children between the ages of four and six years old, together with a parent, listened to two books by each author, during three storytime sessions. Children's spontaneous responses to the readings were recorded on videotape. Response was defined as the comments and gestures children made in regard to the readings. Two identical 10-question surveys, one for the books by Sendak and one for the books by Mayer, were administered to parents and children after the storytime session. Responses collected from the data included: likes/dislikes of stories and pictures, scariness of stories and pictures, mood, content of favorite story, and importance of illustrations in understanding the stories better. Results indicated that 98% of the 50 participants liked the stories by Mayer and 86% liked those of Sendak. Participants also liked the pictures, and the stories and the pictures did not scare them. "Happy" and "good" were the predominant feelings generated by the pictures in all four stories. Overall, children liked best Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (78%). Responses tabulated from parents suggested that illustration is necessary and helpful to better understanding a story.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Christy L. Kaciuba. The Function of Illustration in the Books Written By Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. 1998. (Under the direction of Dr. Holly G. Willett, Program in School and Public Librarianship.)

This study describes the function of illustration in books written by Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. Results indicated that most of the participants liked the stories by Mayer (98%) more than those by Sendak (86%). This study found that illustration does influence children's understanding and enjoyment of a story.

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Chapter 1

Statement of Purpose

Introduction

Illustration is an effective tool of communication in children's literature. Illustrations assist in telling a story and providing visual pleasure to young viewers and readers. Pictures, by nature, are different from words, and communicate different forms of information in different ways (Nodelman, 1996). Yet, pictures can communicate automatically and be understood effortlessly by young children. This is particularly true of children who are inexperienced readers but not inexperienced listeners (Nodelman, 1988).

The commitment to maintain the important function of illustration in children's literature is evidenced in the books written by children's author/illustrators, Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. Maurice Sendak is one of the best-known modern illustrators and writers of children's picture books in the history of children's literature. Sendak, with his Caldecott award-winning book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, paved the way in creating more realistic child characters who are not the nostalgic models of innocence that many authors portrayed in books before the 1960s. Sendak employs pen and ink illustrations with ample cross-hatching and a rich palette of colors in many of his books. He has demonstrated an artistic adaptability that is unconventional by creating drawings inspired by everything from nineteenth-century illustrators to twentieth-century cartoon artists (Lesniak & Trosky, 1993).

Because of the themes and images he presents in his work, Sendak has become a controversial literary figure.

A contemporary of Maurice Sendak, who is also well known for his unconventional writing and illustrating, is Mercer Mayer. In his writing, Mayer's language can be simple or sophisticated and his illustrations run the gamut of artistic styles (Telgen, 1993). Mayer's illustrations have incorporated elements such as bold, black lines to the cross-hatching technique of Sendak. Yet, many of his illustrations exhibit a rich use of color and careful attention to detail. Because of his style, Mercer Mayer has become a popular author/illustrator with young children.

Both author/illustrators are excellent examples of popularity and artistic sensibility in children's literature today. For the purpose of providing feedback on both author/illustrators, regarding their popularity and the significance of their illustrations, a study was conducted with the patrons of the Burlington County Library (NJ) and its branch locations.

Method

During three storytime sessions, a sample of 50 children, boys and girls between the ages of four and six years old, together with their parent, listened to the readings of two books by each author, Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. The books by Sendak were *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Seven Little Monsters*. *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* and *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* are the books by Mayer. As the librarian read each selection, visual responses of both parents and children were measured via videotape. Visual responses observed included whether or not the child was focused on the librarian or distracted by the presence of the parent or his/her peers. At the conclusion of the storytime session, a questionnaire of approximately 10 questions, was given to the parent and child.

The child with the help of the parent answered the questions in response to the readings. Several copies of each author's book were distributed to each parent/child group, so that they could refer to them while answering the survey questions.

The questions asked in the storytime survey will be simplified to compensate for the range in age of the children. Some of the questions asked in the questionnaire were as follows: Did you like the story? Did you like the pictures? and Did the pictures scare you?

Results

Conclusions were made from the statistics of the survey and visual responses observed during the storytime sessions. These results were used to determine the following: popularity of each author/illustrator, likes/dislikes of story, likes/dislikes of illustrations, and mood of the story. Furthermore, the data collected in the survey enabled children's librarians to gauge their patron's response to storytimes. It also gave the librarian statistics that measured the importance of illustration in storytime sessions.

Definition of Terms

In this study, terms were defined as follows:

Illustration- A picture that helps make something clear or attractive.

Patron- Any individual who uses the services offered by an establishment (ie. library).

Picture book – A book for children with limited text and many pictures.

Storytime- An organized reading of selected books to children in a public setting (ie. library).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In answering the question, "What function does illustration have in the books written by Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer?" one has to examine the history of children's illustrations. The areas covered in this chapter will include: historical perspective, effects of illustration in children's literature, criticism of Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer, survey design and children's responses to picture books.

Historical Perspective

The following four books offer insight into the importance of children's illustration.

Myth, Magic, And Mystery: One Hundred Years of American Children's Book Illustration, by Michael Patrick Hearn (1996), discusses the history of children's illustration in America from the 1890s to the present. Hearn presents Sendak's aesthetic influences from the Busby Berkeley musicals of the '30s and '40s to the animated films of Walt Disney. Special attention is also given to some of Sendak's work. Hearn briefly comments on the controversial, considered by some critics to be too scary, *Where the Wild Things Are*. The imagery taken from *King Kong* and the artistic

elements such as the use of cross-hatching and a series of double-page spreads without text have made this book a classic.

American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within by Barbara Bader (1976), examines the importance of Sendak's illustrations to children's literature, with his integration of pictorial metaphors and little text in his books. Bader also examines the controversy that arose when *Where the Wild Things Are* was first introduced. This book challenged the meaning of traditional fairytales which were straightforward, tasteful and discreet. *Where the Wild Things Are* made the critics reconsider fairytales to be other than "simple stories; and children had come to be seen as less simple creatures too, and possessed of dark visions of their own" (p. 514). Nevertheless, this picturebook fantasy catapulted Sendak's popularity with children and adults.

Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life by Frederick J. Harvey Darton (1958), does not deal with picture books specifically, but he includes them in his historic survey. Darton creates a scholarly account of the development of children's literature – beginning with the chapbook versions of medieval romances and covering all important writing for children. George Cruikshank, John Newberry and Randolph Caldecott are carefully examined.

Sing a Song for Sixpence: The English Picture Book Tradition and Randolph Caldecott by Brian Alderson (1986), examines such areas as representational illustration and illustrative techniques, the influences of William Hogarth, William Blake, the Cruikshanks and Randolph Caldecott on the English picture book, the establishment of English narrative illustration and the arrival of commercial picture books. Alderson's primary focus is on Caldecott's achievements and contributions to

the picture book tradition. Sendak greatly admired George Cruikshank and he copied his style of crosshatch. He also was fond of the humor and vitality of Randolph Caldecott's illustrations.

Although the literature revealed several critical reviews of Sendak's work, no such reviews were available for Mayer.

Effects of Illustration in Children's Literature

Geoff Moss and Perry Nodelman argue that illustrations are counterparts to text and that they are essential to the work.

In Perry Nodelman's *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books (1988),* Nodelman argues for the necessity of illustration in children's literature. He contends that the illustrations are complex symbols that take on the task of telling the bulk of the story. He also addresses the arguments against illustration in children's literature. Researchers argue against the educational value of the pictures. They are counterproductive to the goal of teaching reading, they limit the imagination of young readers and their very attractiveness draws attention away from the text. Nodelman counteracts these ideas by saying that pictures are counterproductive only for those who do not know how to use them. He makes the same recommendation for the distracting quality of pictures. The suggestion being that those who know how to use pictures often find them helpful in the processes of decoding and comprehension. The limitation of imagination provided by pictures is not negative but enriching. Nodelman states that "pictures offer viewers more specific information to consider and to base further and more complex imaginings upon" (p. 278).

"Metafiction, Illustration, and the Poetics of Children's Literature" by Geoff Moss (1992), addresses post-modernism in children's illustration. Moss defines post-modernism as being concerned with ontological rather than epistemological matters. Rather than being concerned with knowledge about the world, postmodernism is more interested in problems of modes of being, with such questions as: "What is a world? What kinds of world are there? and What happens when different worlds are placed in confrontation or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (p. 55). Moss states that "some picture books do exhibit some of the characteristics ascribed to postmodernist works and that, because the audience is very young and has a limited grasp of the narrative and graphic code for decoding picturebooks, artists have used the playfulness of this audience to produce works which are at the limits of children's literature" (p. 55). He also describes the "complexity of the combination of word and image" (p. 52). Moss suggests that text and illustration have equal importance.

Cheri Anderson, in her work, "The Role of Picturebook Illustration in Visual Literacy" (1995), shares a similar view. Anderson quotes Maurice Sendak in describing picturebooks as, "a juxtaposition of picture and word, a counterpoint" (p. 305). She also explores the value of visual literacy and the ability of illustrations to "widen children's horizons and to guide them towards deeper comprehension".

The Picture Book as Art Object: A Call for Balanced Reviewing by Kenneth Marantz (1983), discusses his views about picturebooks. Marantz argues that picture books ought to be much more than some "ancillary decoration or visual relief for a literary effort" (p. 152). Picture books are not literary works to be read, but rather art objects to be experienced.

Writing with Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books by Uri Shulevitz (1985), contends that understanding the fundamental difference between illustrated storybooks and picture books and applying this knowledge can help in creating better books of both kinds. Shulevitz believes pictures provide information not contained in the words. Pictures and words are "read" which means fewer words are needed to tell the story. Picture sequence, story content and purpose of illustration are just some of the other topics addressed in this book.

On the other hand, "The Role of Pictures in Learning to Read" by Douglas Newton (1995), raises the argument that pictures could hinder the development of reading skills. Newton argues that pictures are supplemental to text. It is necessary for the teacher to determine the value of illustration to the beginning reader.

Criticism of Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer

This thesis compares two author/illustrators. As a result, criticism, particularly comparison of the authors, is integral to answering the question. These sources present criticism of both Sendak and Mayer.

In *The Picture Book Comes of Age* by Joseph and Chava Schwarcz (1991), the nature of the child and the conditions of childhood are examined through three of Sendak's picture books, *Where the Wild Things Are, In the Night Kitchen* and *Outside Over There*. Joseph Schwarcz also critically examines Sendak's defense of his trilogy. Sendak views the three works as a unit because his intention was to show "how children master various feelings… and manage to come to grips with the realities of their lives" (p. 195).

Another detailed approach to examining one of Sendak's picture books is analyzed in John Clement Ball's, "Max's Colonial Fantasy: Rereading Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*" (1997). Ball looks at the book that once provoked loud opposition, with its "frightening" imagery, in its day. He also details the critical accord that has emerged for this book , which celebrates the very identity and values it was once thought to undermine. Max achieves personal empowerment without violence by dominating grotesque creatures in another land.

The first major retrospective of children's book illustrator Maurice Sendak is surveyed in *The Art of Maurice Sendak* by Selma G. Lanes (1980). Lanes provides in detail a biographical profile of Sendak, a picture biography of his work, the illustrators he has admired and emulated, and the places, objects, and people that have moved him deeply. Lanes states that "when illustrators were using bright colors and abstract designs in the midfifties, Sendak experimented with crosshatching techniques from the nineteenth century" (p. 51). Sendak has provided long and changing lists of those artists of the nineteenth century who influenced his work. Some of the illustrators are: the French illustrator, Louis Maurice Boutet de Monvel, the English illustrators, George Cruikshank and Randolph Caldecott; and the German illustrators, Heinrich Hoffman and Wilhelm Busch. Lanes also analyzes *Where the Wild Things Are*, a book thought by many parents and educators to be too scary for young children.

Paul Arakelian's "Text and Illustration: A Stylistic Analysis of Books by Sendak and Mayer" (1985), makes the comparison between Maurice Sendak's, *Where the Wild Things Are* and Mercer Mayer's, *There's a Nightmare in My Closet*. Arakelian explains the similarities between both books. However, Arakelian devotes most of his

analysis to the stylistic differences between the books. The four aspects analyzed are: arrangement of text and illustrations on the page; the structure of the illustrations; and the relationship between the text and illustrations. The arrangement of text and illustration depends on a distinction between page and panel. The term "panel" refers to two facing pages linked by a common text/drawing or to one page with an independent text/drawing (p. 122). *Wild Things* has nineteen panels and *Nightmare* has twenty. The style and content of the illustrations in these books also create different structural relationships. Some panels are the same basic scene, except for changes in coloring, light, position of characters or other details. The relationship between the text and illustration in both books relates to the structure of each panel. The total number of sentences, total words, independent clauses, and subordinate clauses are just some of the other elements discussed.

In her review of *Where the Wild Things Are* by Sendak, H. B. Quimby praises both the imaginative and beautifully executed illustrations and each word of the text that was used to express Max's mood (1963). The wild things are both ugly and humorous but never fearsome. Quimby also recognizes that this kind of story will be questioned by many adults but accepted wisely by many children.

The review of Sendak's *Seven Little Monsters* by M.M. Burns (1977) was lukewarm. The seven monsters are meant to delight rather than terrify younger audiences, but Burns also comments "that the sequence of the monsters activities does not reflect their respective positions on the page" (p. 303). As a result, small children just learning numerical order could be easily confused. The illustrations lack the multi-dimensional quality of Sendak's earlier work.

Doris Solomon's review of *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* by Mayer, comments on the similarities in content to Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are (1968).* Nevertheless, Mayer's book is "bibliotherapeutic" in intent with elements of sensitivity and comedy.

Ilene Cooper's review of *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* by Mayer, remarks on the lack of vitality and humor that first appeared in Mayer's, *There's a Nightmare in My Closet (1987).* The illustrations have a heavy appearance. Cooper adds that "dark hues and solid shapes are accented by thick, black lines" (p. 1208). Nevertheless, Cooper feels the oversize pictures and the short, snappy text will work well in storytime groups.

Survey Design and Children's Responses to Picturebooks

As Perry Nodelman states in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature (1996),* composition of pictures are "means of conveying information about how we're to respond to the story" (p. 219). Nodelman also describes the components of picturebooks, which would be beneficial information in developing survey questions. The following sources were also helpful in survey design and measuring children's responses to picture books.

In "Construction of the Questionnaire in Survey Research" by Barbara Moran (1990), necessary elements for constructing good survey questions and designing a pleasing layout for the questionnaire are discussed. Some of the suggestions made by Moran on questionnaire construction include: making questions as short as possible, avoiding the use of slang, jargon, and technical terms, and making questions as impersonal as possible. Moran also discusses suggestions for a pleasing layout. She

suggests questionnaires that are uncluttered, with a lot of "white space"; enough room for written answers; and the use of offset printing to reproduce questionnaires.

"Interviewing Young Children" by Lynn McDonald and Holly Willett (1990), is a collaborative effort that addresses several aspects of interviewing children. Topics include: interviewing skills with children if you are a librarian, the cultural diversity of children, interviewing techniques used with children versus adults, the cognitive and verbal characteristics of children under the age of eight years old, how to interview children and confronting difficulties with interviewing young children. Some of the interviewing tips made by McDonald and Willett include: explaining in-detail to children about what you are going to do during the interview process; allowing children to leave a place, such as a library, with something in their hands; and giving children time before you do your agenda.

Knowing Children: Participant Observation with Minors by Gary Alan Fine and Kent L. Sandstrom (1988), investigates the essential components of participant observation with the various stages of child development. Fine and Sandstrom consider the following areas: the role of the researcher, the issue of trust between researcher and participants, ethical issues in research, and cultural understanding of your participants. One of their suggestions is to become a friend to the participants and interact with them without having any explicit authority role. Fine and Sandstrom state that "adopting the friend role suggests that the observer treats the participants with respect and that he or she desires to acquire competency in their social worlds" (p. 17). They also suggest the need for informed consent with children and adults. Children need to be given the

choice to accept or reject participation in a study. Researchers also need to obtain consent and support from adults in conducting research with minors.

Betty Moon, in "Where the Wild Things Are" (1996), offers questions to ask children before and after reading the story, and extension activities to do with children for enrichment. Before reading the story, Moon suggests showing the children both the front and back covers of the book. Some of the questions to ask them are: What are the "Wild Things"? Are the monsters the same or different to one another? and What do you think the story is about? After reading the story, Moon offers additional questions such as: Which part of the story did you like best? How did Max feel at the end of the story? and Did the story make you feel happy, sad or frightened?

"The Growth of Story Meaning" by Joanne Golden, Annyce Meiners, and Stanley Lewis (1992), explores story meaning in a classroom context. During this particular story event, Sendak's, *Where the Wild Things Are,* is discussed. The event is followed from the teacher's introduction of the book through various phases of the response process. The use of *Where the Wild Things Are* involved the children in a variety of reading and language processes. Some of these processes included: oral and written language in all phases of the story development, listening to the story, rereading the story, and discussing the story with others. The major phases in the story event include: building story meaning in a group reading discussion, exploring a character's personality, communicating with the author, and expressing personal meaning through art. Story meaning was developed in the following way. As the teacher read the story, she would draw the children's attention to an aspect of the story or invited them to

participate. In other instances, children initiated comments about the story and nonverbal reactions to the story.

A similar study was conducted in "The line and texture of aesthetic response: Primary children study authors and illustrators" by Sandra Madura (1995). Madura focuses on the aesthetic response to literature by comparing the stories and illustrations of many different children's author/illustrators. By organizing and implementing an author/illustrator unit, Madura was able to focus students attention on a picture book as a "work of art" where language and illustration blend together to create a world of verbal and visual images to be absorbed, appreciated, and experienced (p. 112). Through reading, rereading, and discussion of an author's stories, Madura found that this provided familiarity with the language used by an author, gave children an opportunity to rethink and expand their impressions of a book as a complete artistic piece; and created a format for children to make comparisons between authors and their books. Madura also incorporated art lessons into her unit. Art lessons provided the students with tools to explore an illustrator's medium more fully.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This study was conducted at the Headquarters, Bordentown, and Cinnaminson branches of the Burlington County Library System in NJ in the months of February and March, 1998.

Participants

Fifty children, boys and girls between the ages of four and six years old, together with their parent, volunteered to participate in this study. The limitations to this study are, the participants were all pulled from a storytime audience, and participants are all between the ages of four and six. All but one of the participating families were white and most of the parents in the study were mothers. The exception was a black woman and her three children. It is likely that the participants came from middle class families where the parents had at least a high school education, based on the 1990 US census in the GIS (Geographical Information Survey) LandView III county data file. According to the census, 81.6% of the population of Burlington County, NJ had a high school diploma and 21.3% had a bachelor's degree (Environmental Protection Agency, 1997).

Apparatus

The following books by Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer were used during the storytime sessions: *Where the Wild Things Are* (Harper & Row, 1963), *Seven Little Monsters*

(Harper & Row, 1976), *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* (Dial, 1968), and *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* (Dial, 1987). Both written and visual responses were measured at the storytime sessions. Two identical surveys of 10 questions each, one for the books by Sendak and one for the books by Mayer, determined written responses (see Appendix A). The survey questions were designed so the children would easily understand them. The number of questions was kept to a minimum in order to ensure the children's attention would not wander. Questions asked in the survey included: likes/dislikes of stories and pictures, scariness of stories and pictures, mood, content of favorite story and importance of illustrations in understanding the stories better. A video camera recorded the children's visual responses during the session.

Procedures

During three afternoon storytime sessions at the Burlington County Library and two of its branch locations, a sample of 50 children drawn from library patrons, 27 boys and 23 girls between the ages of four and six years old, together with a parent, listened to the readings of two books by each author, Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. Parents are not required to stay with their children during storytime sessions at the Burlington County Library, but for the purposes of this study, they were asked to attend. Sendak's books were *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Seven Little Monsters*. *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* and *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* were the books by Mayer.

Children sat in a semi-circle on the floor with the librarian, while the parents sat behind them. The researcher sat unobtrusively in the back of the storytelling room making written observations of parent/child responses. As the librarian read each selection, visual responses were recorded by videotape. The video camera was positioned high on a tabletop

behind the librarian, focused on the participants, so that their faces could be photographed. The children could easily see the camera but they did not comment on it or appear distracted by it.

At the conclusion of the storytime session, children were asked a pretest question: "What story did you like best?" The researcher observed that all of the participants in the three storytime sessions thoroughly enjoyed the books by both authors. Additional observations were also made at each storytime location. The participants at the Headquarters facility unanimously chose Mercer Mayer's *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* as the story they liked best. As a result, they begged the librarian to read it again. On the other hand, children at the Bordentown Branch location shouted for more of the "Wild rumpus." This lively group of children loved Sendak's monsters and the boy, Max, in *Where the Wild Things Are*. Participants at the Cinnaminson Branch location had mixed reviews about their favorite story. Some of the children chose Mayer's *There's an Alligator Under My Bed,* while others selected Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. Two identical questionnaires, one for the books by Sendak and one for the books by Mayer, of 10 questions were then administered to the parent and child. Eight of the questions in the survey were directed to the child, while the last two questions were asked of the parent. The child, assisted by the parent, answered the questions in response to the readings. Copies of each author's books were distributed to each parent/child group, so that they could refer to them while answering the survey questions. During the survey process, most of the children were very cooperative. The opportunity to view each author's books again while they completed the surveys made the experience more enjoyable. However, some of the participants were easily distracted.

Fortunately, positive reinforcement from the parents to focus on the survey questions remedied the situation.

Analysis

Written responses collected through each survey were tallied to gauge the importance of the various stories and illustrations of these two author/illustrators to children. Visual responses were analyzed from the videotape and grouped into a range of categories that described the level of the children's attentiveness and interest in each story.

Chapter 4

Results

Results of Survey

The results of the storytime surveys indicated that most of the 50 participants preferred the stories by Mercer Mayer. Participants also liked the pictures and the stories, and the pictures did not scare them. The participants' responses of "happy" and "good" were the predominant feeling generated by the pictures in all four stories. Children liked best Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are.* However, *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* by Mercer Mayer came in a very close second. Both *Where the Wild Things Are* and *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* received positive responses from boys more than girls.

Parents were asked to respond to the question of the importance of illustration. Most of them agreed that illustration is necessary and helpful to better understanding a story.

Video

Results from the video showed that during all three storytime sessions, most of the children were attentive. A few of the children recorded on the video were observed talking amongst themselves. The video also showed many reactions of the children when asked, "What was your favorite story?" Their reactions ranged from shyness to a boisterous enthusiasm for their favorite story. Shyness was demonstrated by some

children through hesitation in their response. Boisterous enthusiasm was demonstrated by some children through shouting and an eagerness to respond. The video reaffirmed the researcher's field observations.

Statistics

As shown in Table 1, 98% of the 50 participants liked the stories by Mercer Mayer and 86% liked the stories by Maurice Sendak. Six of the participants said they did not like the stories by Sendak and only one child did not like the stories by Mayer. Ninety-four percent of the 50 participants liked the pictures in the Mercer Mayer stories to 92% who liked the pictures in the stories by Maurice Sendak. Three of the participants did not like the pictures in Sendak's books and three did not like the pictures in Mayer's books. Results were then tabulated in response to whether or not the stories and pictures scared the children. Eighty-six percent of the children said Sendak's stories did not scare them. Ninety-six percent said Mayer's stories did not scare them. Six of the participants indicted they were scared by the Sendak stories, while two of the participants were scared by Mayer's stories. The results as to whether or not the pictures scared the children were very similar to the response for the text. Eighty-eight percent said they were not scared by the pictures in Sendak's stories and 98% said they were not scared by those in Mayer's works. Five of the participants said the pictures in Sendak's stories scared them and one child said the pictures in Mayer's stories scared them. Only one child surveyed chose not to answer any of the questions for Sendak.

Question 5

Table 2 shows participants' responses to the general feeling generated by the pictures in both authors' stories. The predominant feelings about all four stories were

happy (42%) and good (64%). Thirteen participants did not respond to this question. The high number of no answers resulted from the fact that this question required a more sophisticated response than some of the others. The lack of participation to this question may have been due to the younger children not knowing how to express their feelings in words. This is illustrated by the fact that most of the participants who failed to respond to this question were four year olds, the youngest in the survey group.

Table 1

Quantitative Results to Questions 1-4

Question		Sendak		Mayer	
		n	%	n	%
Did you like the story?	Yes	43	86	49	98
	No	6	12	1	2
	N/A	1	2	0	0
Did you like the pictures?	Yes	46	92	47	94
	No	3	6	3	6
	N/A	1	2	0	0
Did the stories scare you?	Yes	6	12	2	4
	No	43	86	48	96
	N/A	1	2	0	0
Did the pictures scare you?	Yes	5	10	1	2
	No	44	88	49	98
	N/A	1	2	0	0

Question 6

Table 3 illustrates the story by each author that the children liked best. For Sendak, more children (72%) preferred *Where the Wild Things Are* over *Seven Little Monsters* (16%). For Mayer, more children (70%) preferred *There's an Alligator In My Bed* over *There's a Nightmare In My Closet* (20%). Eleven of the 50 participants did not

respond to this question. Forty-two percent of the boys preferred *Where the Wild Things Are* and 30% of the girls did likewise. Thirty-eight percent of the boys liked *There's an Alligator Under My Bed*, as did 32% of the girls (see Table 4).

Table 2

Qualitative Responses to Question 5, *How did the pictures make you feel?*

Feeling	Sendak		Mayer	
	n	%	n	%
Perfect	0	0	1	2
Mad	2	4	0	0
Happy	14	28	7	14
Bad	1	2	1	2
Scared	4	8	3	6
Good	15	30	17	34
Like an Alligator	0	0	1	2
OK	3	6	3	6
Funny/Laugh	3	6	5	10
Sad	1	2	1	2
Like the monsters	0	0	1	2
Silly	0	0	1	2
Proud	0	0	1	2
Interested	1	2	1	2
Bored	1	2	0	0
N/A	6	12	7	14

Table 3

Quantitative Responses to Question 6, *Which of these stories did you like best?*

Story	Sendak		Mayer	
	n	%	n	%
Where the Wild Things Are	36	72	0	0
Seven Little Monsters	8	16	0	0
There's a Nightmare in My Closet	0	0	10	20
There's an Alligator Under My Bed	0	0	35	70
N/A	6	12	5	10

Table 4

Gender breakdown of question 6, *Which of these stories did you like best?*

Story	Girls		Boys	
	n	%	n	%
Where the Wild Things Are	15	30	21	42
Seven Little Monsters	5	10	3	6
N/A – Sendak	2	4	3	6
There's a Nightmare in My Closet	6	12	4	8
There's an Alligator Under My Bed	16	32	19	38
N/A - Mayer	3	6	3	6

Question 7

Participants were asked to identify the part of their favorite story they liked best. This was an open-ended question. *Where the Wild Things Are* respondents said their favorite part of the story was as follows: a boy who was made king of all wild things (3), wild monsters (4), where Max became king (3), and the wild rumpus (3). The respondents to *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* said their favorite part of the story as the following: when the boy saw the alligator under the bed (4), the alligator eating all of the food in the house (4), the alligator left food all over the place (4), and the alligator was everywhere in the boy's room (3). Eleven of the 50 participants did not answer this question. The high number of no answers may have once again resulted from the fact that this question required a more sophisticated response than some of the others. The lack of participation to this question may have been due to the younger children not knowing how to express their feelings. Most of the participants who failed to respond to this question were four- year- olds.

Question 8

Children also were asked what they thought their favorite story was about. This was also an open-ended question. Respondents of *Where the Wild Things Are* said that this story was about: wild things (4) a boy who was first dreaming and then he woke up (3), Max has a rumpus with the wild things (3) a boy sees where the wild things are (3), and a little boy who made peace with the monsters (3). The respondents to *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* said that this story was about: an alligator under the bed (5), a boy who wants to go to sleep but he's scared of the alligator under the bed (5), the boy knows there's an alligator under his bed (5), an alligator and a boy (5), an alligator that

was hungry (5), and an alligator that eats all the food in the house (3). Eleven of the 50 participants did not answer this question. The high number of no answers may have once again resulted from the fact that this question required a more sophisticated response than some of the others. Once again, the lack of participation to this question may have been due to the younger children not knowing how to express their feelings in words. Most of the participants who failed to respond to this question were four-year-olds.

Parents

The parents of the participants were asked to respond to two questions in the survey. One asked how important illustrations were for each author's work (see Table 5). The results indicate that 70% of the parents felt that illustration is a necessary component in the stories by Mercer Mayer while 62% of the parents felt that illustration is necessary in the stories by Maurice Sendak. Two of the parents surveyed believed that illustration was not necessary for either author's works. Six of the parents chose not to respond to the question for Sendak and two of the parents did not answer the question for Mayer. Parents were then asked if the pictures helped them understand the stories better (see Table 6). Ninety-two percent of the parents said that the pictures helped them to understand the stories by Mercer Mayer, while 78% of the parents said that the pictures helped them to understand the stories by Maurice Sendak. Five of the parents felt that the pictures in the stories by Sendak did not help them to understand the story better, while two of the parents felt that the pictures in the stories by Mayer did not help them to understand the stories better. Six of the parents did not answer the question for Sendak and two of the parents did not answer the question for Mayer.

Table 5

Quantitative Responses to Question 9 (for the parents), *On a scale of 1 to 5, how important is illustration in each author's work?*

Importance of Illustration	Sendak		Mayer	
	n	%	n	%
1 (Not important)	0	0	1	2
2	2	4	1	2
3	3	6	2	4
4	8	16	9	18
5 (Necessary)	31	62	35	70
N/A	6	12	2	4

Table 6

Quantitative Responses to Question 10 (for the parents), *Did the pictures help you understand the stories better?*

Parents' Response	Sendak		Mayer	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	39	78	46	92
No	5	10	2	4
N/A	6	12	2	4

In summary, most of the participants during all three storytime sessions preferred the stories by Mercer Mayer than the stories by Maurice Sendak. But they still liked Sendak, just not as much as Mayer. The children liked the pictures and the stories and pictures did not scare them. All four stories generated positive feelings in all of the participants. Although, children preferred the stories by Mayer to Sendak, *Where the*

Wild Things Are by Sendak was the story children liked best. Moreover, children were inclined to borrow library material by Mayer to read again more than they were inclined to borrow Sendak's works because they asked to check out the copies of Mayer's works after the storytime session. The parents surveyed believed in the role of illustration in helping children to understand a story better. From the results of the statistics and visual responses observed during the storytime sessions, conclusions and recommendations can be made in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Summary

This research was a study of the function of illustration in the books written by Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. During the three storytime sessions, 50 children between the ages of four and six years old, together with a parent, listened to the readings of two books by each of these two authors. Visual responses of both parent and child were observed by videotape. At the end of the storytime session, the child – aided by a parent - completed a 10-question survey in response to the readings.

Conclusions

Statistics from the survey and the visual responses observed during the storytime sessions led to the study's conclusions. The results were used to determine the following: popularity of each author/illustrator, likes/dislikes of story, likes/dislikes of illustrations, and mood of the story. The majority of the 50 participants surveyed preferred Mayer's over Sendak's stories. Children also liked the pictures and the stories and the pictures did not scare them. The pictures in all four stories generated a positive feeling in most of the participants. Immediately following the storytime sessions, the library's copies of Mayer's books were loaned to some of the children who asked for them while there was no great demand for Sendak's books.

Perhaps Mayer's popularity can be attributed to the content of his stories, the clarity of his illustrations, and the use of bright and colorful illustrations. Although Ilene Cooper's review of *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* contradicts this view. Children obviously preferred the bold lines and glossy illustrations in this book. *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* almost surpassed Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, as the story children liked best. *Alligator* was liked by 70% of the participants while 72% liked *Wild Things*.

However, Sendak's popularity has not waned as one of the best-known author/illustrators in the history of children's literature. *Where the Wild Things Are* was the most liked story. It appealed more to the boys than the girls. The videotaped responses of the storytime sessions showed this to be true. Participants enthusiastically responded, "Wild rumpus" and "We want the wild things." Of course, most of the participants during this particular storytime were boys. Nevertheless, Sendak continues to have a devoted following.

This study confirms the importance of illustrations in the books by each author/illustrator, Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. Cheri Anderson said in "The Role of Picturebook Illustration in Visual Literacy" (1995), as children "explore the role of illustration in picturebooks, they become more visually literate." (p. 305). Essentially, the participants in this study were asked to judge the pictures. It also appeared that the children could easily understand the stories with little text. This was evident in all four stories in this study. Uri Shulevitz in *Writing with Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books (1985)* said it best, "pictures and words are read which means fewer words are needed to tell the story". The illustrations were also important in decoding and

comprehension as Perry Nodelman wrote in *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books* (1988). The children were able to understand what was happening in the story via the pictures without being experienced readers.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, recommendations can be made from the data and for future study. For children's librarians, the data collected was a strong indicator of children's positive responses to storytime sessions. In particular, the storytime sparked the participating children's interest in the works by these two author/illustrators. Based on the popularity of these titles, *Where the Wild Things Are* and *There's an Alligator Under My Bed*, children's librarians would want to keep these books in their collection for patron use and future storytime sessions. In addition, children's librarians should continue to incorporate many illustrated picture books into their storytime repertoire because illustration helps children understand a story better.

Regarding future study, this research could be conducted in a more controlled environment. Participants would be in small group sessions of no more than five children or there would be individual consultations with a child during the storytime process. In these situations, children may be inclined to give more detailed responses without the external distractions of a room filled with parents and peers. A little rambunctious behavior by some of the children and their parents reprimanding reactions distracted some of the other children. This study, with the above suggestions, could be conducted on a district or county level to compare similarities and differences within each district or county.

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Appendix A

Letter to Parents

Dear Parents:

I am a graduate student in the Secondary Education Department at Rowan University in New Jersey. I will be conducting a research project as part of my Master's thesis concerning the function of illustration in the books by children's author/illustrators Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. I am requesting permission for your child to participate in this research. The goal of the study is to determine the purpose and importance of illustration in children's literature as experienced through the works of these two authors.

Each child will listen to two books by each author/illustrator Maurice Sendak and Mercer Mayer. During the storytime session, the child's visual responses to the readings will be videotaped. I will retain the videotape at the conclusion of the study. To preserve the child's confidentiality, names will not be used to identify individuals. At the end of the storytimes session, each child, together with their parent will be given a questionnaire. The parent will ask the child a series of ten questions. The responses of the child will be recorded by the parent.

Please respond to the following questions. All responses will be confidential. If you have questions or
concerns, please contact me at 267-9660 x3038.

Thank You,

Christy Kaciuba

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate
statement below.

_____ I grant permission for my child to participate in this study.

_____ I do not grant permission for my child to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Parent/Guardian signature Date

Mercer Mayer Survey

There's A Nightmare in My Closet

There's an Alligator Under My Bed

Please circle responses to questions 1-4

Please respond to questions 5 - 8 with short answers.

Boy or Girl Age _____

1. Did you like the stories?

Yes No

2. Did you like the pictures?

Yes No

3. Did the stories scare you?

Yes No

4. Did the pictures scare you?

Yes No

5. How did the pictures make you feel?

6. Which of this author's stories do you like best? (please use this book to respond to numbers 7 & 8)

7. Which part of this story (number 6) did you enjoy the most?

8. What is the story about? (number 6)

For the parent:
Please answer the following questions:

9. How important are the illustrations in this author's books on a scale of 1-5 (one being unimportant and five being necessary)

1 2 3 4 5

10. Did the pictures help you understand the stories better?

Yes No

Maurice Sendak Survey
Where the Wild Things Are
Seven Little Monsters
Please circle responses to questions 1-4
Please respond to questions 5 - 8 with short answers.

1. Did you like the stories?
Yes No

2. Did you like the pictures?
Yes No

3. Did the stories scare you?
Yes No

4. Did the pictures scare you?
Yes No

5. How did the pictures make you feel?

6. Which of this author's stories do you like best? (please use this book to respond to numbers 7 & 8)

7. Which part of this story (number 6) did you enjoy the most?

8. What is the story about? (number 6)

For the parent:
Please answer the following questions:

9. How important are the illustrations in this author's books on a scale of 1-5 (one being unimportant and five being necessary)

1 2 3 4 5

10. Did the pictures help you understand the stories better?

Yes No